

# Altruism and empathy in primates

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## Introduction

- Primates are an order of mammals belonging to the man and his kin.
- It seems to be that these animals often help each other when it is needed, an important factor when it comes to live in society within a group.
- This work is based on the altruism and the empathy presented by them in different situations.

## Objectives

At the end of this work, I would like to answer:

- Why they help to each other? Is it for the benefit of the group or for an own good?
- They will always expect a reward in exchange for helping others?
- Is there some similarity with altruism and empathy that occurs in the human species?

## Altruism

- Altruism is the ability to care for others. Involves alien benefit in exchange for a cost of their own.
- Between kin and individuals more socially closer → ↑ intensity of altruistic interactions [1].
- Reciprocal altruism and cooperation → alliances and coalitions between individuals → more cohesion in the group. Ex: grooming or helping in battles.
- In humans and chimpanzees: altruistic motivations appear during the ontogeny.



A young chimpanzee comforting and adult that has lost a fight.

## Empathy

- Empathy is the ability to "read" accurately the emotions of other individuals and to respond to these.
- It is based on emotional contagion and consolation [2].
- There is a close relationship between empathy and imitation (originated by mirror neurons) [3].
- In general: emphatic response is amplified by → similarity, familiarity, social closeness, and the positive experience with the other individual.



Two chimpanzees grooming themselves.

## Prosocial behavior

- Is similar to the altruism, but here, there is no cost for the actor.
- It responds to the others with sympathy, condolence, cooperation, help, rescue and delivery or generosity. Ex. sharing food with other members, or also the mother-infant bond [4].



A group of macaques sharing food.

## Conclusions

- Primates help each other at different times and for different reasons → not sure if it is a selfish action or not.
- Between kin and individuals socially closer, altruism and empathy increase.
- Humans can perceive the needs of others in a more sophisticated way.
- Studies based on too few species of primates → many doubts and uncertainties to be resolved.

## References:

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